The Bridger-Teton National Forest: Management, Planning, and Outreach

Situation Assessment

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Prepared by the

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About the Environmental Dispute Resolution Program

The University of Utah's EDR Program promotes collaboration, mediation, stakeholder engagement, and other alternative dispute resolution (ADR) processes as a means to address environmental and public policy conflicts in Utah and the Mountain West. The program does so by providing process design, facilitation, mediation, stakeholder engagement, public education, and capacity building services, as well as through academic instruction and research.

The EDR Program approach redefines the meaning of ADR, which is usually thought of as an alternative to litigation, to mean "additional dialogue required." In line with this philosophy, we emphasize creating opportunities for dialogue, mutual understanding, and collaborative problem solving. This approach builds long-term relationships and produces enduring and creative on-the-ground results.

About the Ruckelshaus Institute

The Ruckelshaus Institute, a division of the Haub School of Environment and Natural Resources at the University of Wyoming, advances the understanding and resolution of complex environmental and natural resources challenges and supports stakeholder-driven solutions to environmental challenges by conducting and communicating relevant research and promoting collaborative decision making. The Ruckelshaus Institute has four main support programs. First, the Collaborative Solutions Program supports natural resource stakeholders in making decisions about the future through trainings, forums, and decision-making support services. The Private Lands Stewardship program addresses the needs of landowners by drawing on expertise and interdisciplinary collaborations across natural resource management, rangeland ecology, business and finance, law, decision-making, collaborative processes, and other fields. The Wyoming Open Spaces Initiative makes relevant data and information available to planners, policy makers, leaders, and the public to support effective maintenance of Wyoming's open spaces and working landscapes. Last the Ruckelshaus Institute publications are a valuable regional resource supporting decisions and management for complex natural resource issues.

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I. Situation Assessment Background

A situation assessment is a recommended best practice approach used by facilitators and other neutral third-party professionals as a first step in understanding complex issues and exploring the potential for collaborative solutions. Consisting of background research and in-depth confidential interviews with a diverse range of key stakeholders, situation assessments bring clarity to complex issues, provide opportunities for voices to be heard, and build mutual understanding. Situation assessments do not strive to capture the perspectives of a statically significant sample of a population. Instead, they aim to capture the *diversity* of perspectives related to an issue of common concern and to identify areas of agreement, disagreement, and potential mutual gains.

This assessment was commissioned by the US Forest Service Region 4 to assist the agency in future management, planning, and outreach activities related to the Bridger-Teton National Forest (the Forest) in Wyoming. During the spring of 2019, Environmental Dispute Resolution (EDR) Program and Ruckelshaus Institute staff conducted in-depth confidential interviews with 37 individuals representing a diverse range of stakeholder groups that live, work, and recreate on each of the six Districts within the Forest. The intent of these interviews was to illuminate the diversity of perspectives, areas of agreement and disagreement, and opportunities and challenges related to management of, planning for, and engagement around the Forest. A list of stakeholder groups and jurisdictions represented by interviewees is provided in Appendix A. The interview protocol is provided in Appendix B.

This report shares the key findings from this assessment. It first provides a summary of key findings, and then discusses each of these findings in more detail.

II. Summary of Findings

Interviewees widely shared a passionate appreciation for the Forest, which was often reflective of their:

- Deep ties to the Forest;
- Appreciation of the diverse opportunities the Forest provides, particularly related to recreation;
- Appreciation of the wildlife the Forest supports.

Interviewees commonly identified the following aspects of the Forest's management that they perceive to be either working well or not so well. They generally agreed that:

- Agency staff are doing their best to manage the Forest under challenging circumstances;
- Agency staff are generally acting in good faith on behalf of the Forest and the public;
- Partnerships are essential to effective management of the Forest;
- Management at the District level is working well;
- Key stakeholders want to feel heard by and engage with agency staff at the Supervisor's Office;
- Many people feel frustration with the pace of projects and NEPA; and
- The 1990 Forest Plan could benefit from being updated.

Interviewees conveyed mixed perspectives on recreation management, wildlife habitat management, vegetation and wildland fire management, grazing, and minerals, oil, and gas.

Interviewees commonly shared the following key concerns related to the Forest's management:

- Concerns about limited Forest Service funding and personnel;
- Concerns about agency staff turnover;
- Concerns about regional population growth and rising visitation;
- Concerns about motorized recreation;
- Concerns about road and trail maintenance; and
- Concerns about elk feedgrounds.

Interviewees generally saw significant value in engagement and education around the Forest's management and planning activities. They recommended the following strategies for enhancing stakeholder and public education and engagement:

- Increase face-to-face interaction with agency staff by sending agency staff to community events, empowering partners to be ambassadors for the Forest, and establishing a Forest "ride along" program.
- Improve valued public meetings by scheduling events at times that are most convenient for the target audience, sending agency staff who have the right types of knowledge and the authority to answer basic participant questions and respond to comments, and potentially having trained facilitators run meetings and/or planning processes.
- Augment emails, phone calls, and face-to-face interactions, which are effective means of getting the word out, by sharing information via radio, sending press releases and stories to local papers, updating the BTNF website so that information is easier to access, leveraging Facebook to reach small communities or specific interest groups, sharing information via podcasts, and sending mailings and post cards;
- Increase and enhance directional and interpretive signage;
- Partner with other agencies, organizations, and businesses to produce outreach materials that are complete and concise; and

- Increase educational and interpretive programming. A complete list of suggested topics that might merit interpretative signage can be found in the full report.

Interviewees also shared ideas for engaging Native American tribes, Teton County's Latino communities, and youth. These ideas are detailed in the report, at the end of Section 4.

In light of these findings, the Assessment Team recommends the Forest Service consider:

- Building agency staff capacity for acting collaboratively and effectively engaging with stakeholders and the public;
- Fostering a collaborative presence throughout the Forest, especially outside the Jackson District;
- Investing in bringing the public, tribes, and stakeholders "along for the ride" on decision making;
- Engaging stakeholders and the public the way they want to be engaged;
- Hosting community learning forums on key issues;
- Providing regular updates via newspaper, radio and podcast interviews, Facebook, and public meetings;
- Investing in a collaborative recreation planning effort; and
- Leveraging partners, including Friends of the Bridger-Teton, to secure resources and enhance management capacity.

III. Shared Values Around the Forest

When asked to describe their relationship with and what they value about the Forest, interviewees across the board expressed a passionate appreciation for it. As discussed below, this appreciation was often related to the deep ties they have to the Forest, the diverse opportunities provided by the Forest, particularly related to recreation, and the wildlife that live there.

1. Deep ties to the Forest

During the course of interviews, the majority of interviewees expressed significant personal, familial, cultural, and professional connections to the Forest. Interviewees often described the Forest as "more than just a forest," referring to it in terms such as "a family member," "our neighborhood," and "a paradise." One person reflected on the "deep respect" they have for the BTNF. Another interviewee acknowledged that the "entire existence" of their business is because of the Forest Service. A different person said they get "choked up" when they talk about how much they value the Forest and surrounding landscapes. Many people described the Forest as being their "backyard."

Interviewees noted this deep sense of connection and ownership can be a source of conflict. As one interviewee noted, "The sentiment is: I love it deeply, and it's mine." However, and importantly, they also noted that the strong connection many people have to the Forest and the sense of ownership many feel for it can help foster an increased sense of responsibility for and stewardship over the Forest.

2. Diversity of opportunities and uses

The majority of interviewees acknowledged and expressed appreciation for the diverse ways in which people can interact with and experience the Forest. They noted that people use the Forest for things ranging from earning a living to adventuring, hunting, fishing, and wildlife viewing, to performing ceremonies and strengthening familial and cultural bonds. Related to this, some interviewees expressed an appreciation for the relative "freedom" they have on Forest Service lands, as opposed to lands managed by the National Park Service that are much more restrictive in terms of allowed use.

Interviewees reflected on the fact that this diversity of use can be a source of tension and creates challenges for the Forest Service. As one person said, "There's a lot of good things that we have. The Forest is used and everybody likes to use it…But how do you balance that? That's the Forest Service's job and not an easy one, sometimes." This tension was a predominant theme during interviews and is discussed throughout this report.

Some people also noted, in contrast, that the many different uses of the Forest can be framed as something that unites everyone. As one interviewee put it, "Everybody enjoys [the Forest] in different ways, but there's commonality in that we do all enjoy it."

3. Recreation opportunities

In talking about the many different kinds of ways people use the Forest, nearly everyone cited the Forest's recreation opportunities as a key reason they and others value the Forest. The ways in which interviewees recreate on the Forest are diverse and numerous, and their recreation habits vary by age, season, and location; however, the emphasis placed on recreation was common across interviewees who earn their livelihoods on the Forest and those who do not, as well as across Districts.

Interviewees commonly noted that different recreational uses can create conflict. However, it also became clear through interviews that recreational access is a uniting shared value that can be leveraged to engage people in forest planning and management.

Interviewees' perspectives on the Forest's current and future recreation management and planning are discussed in detail in Section IV(8A), under "Recreation management," and in Section V(3) under "Concerns about regional population growth and rising visitation."

4. Wildlife

The strong majority of interviewees identified wildlife as something they deeply value about the Forest. Many of them appreciate the opportunity to view and photograph the Forest's charismatic megafauna. Some interviewees said they find happiness in knowing that they live in a landscape that supports so much biodiversity that it has earned the nickname the "American Serengeti." One interviewee described the region as "Noah's Ark for many of the species that were once more widely distributed across this continent." Notably, about half of the interviewees who said they valued wildlife did so—at least in part—because they enjoy hunting or have done so in the past.

Interviewees' perspectives on the Forest's current and future wildlife management and planning are described in detail in Section IV(8B), under the heading "Wildlife habitat management."

IV. Forest Management: What Is Working Well and Not So Well?

Interviewees were asked to describe the aspects of Forest management they felt were working well and not so well, and to share their concrete ideas for how things could be improved. Themes that emerged are discussed below. Perspectives related to specific management programs (i.e., recreation management; wildlife habitat management; vegetation and wildland fire management; grazing; and minerals, oil, and gas) are discussed in this section under "Perspectives on specific aspects of Forest management."

It is worth noting that during the course of interviews, interviewees commonly expressed empathy toward agency staff and a sense they are working hard to meet stakeholder interests and effectively manage the Forest. Additionally, the importance of relationships between agency staff and stakeholders, tribes, and the general public emerged as a predominant theme, along with a desire for clear, consistent, and accurate communication. Further, and related to that point, when asked what would be helpful for improving the Forest's management and planning and addressing associated challenges, interviewees commonly said the key is more effective education and engagement. They said the Forest has a responsibility to identify and communicate the value of their land and the work they are doing to the public in order to increase public awareness and engagement. These themes are discussed throughout the rest of this report. Specific ideas for how to improve engagement, education, and communication are discussed in Section VI.

1. Agency staff are doing their best to manage the Forest under challenging circumstances

The majority of interviewees expressed the belief that agency staff are working hard and doing a relatively good job of managing the Forest under challenging circumstances. These interviewees appreciate how difficult it is for agency staff to manage, plan for, and conduct outreach and engagement around such a large, diverse land area while meeting the varied needs of millions of users. As detailed in the following section, interviewees were sensitive to the fact that these challenges are compounded by the Forest Service's lack of funding and personnel. They also acknowledge that a growing demand to use the Forest will magnify current challenges.

Interviewees commonly felt that strengthening and expanding partnerships would help support agency staff in meeting growing challenges. More information about this topic, including ideas for how this might be achieved, are discussed in this section under "Partnerships are essential."

2. Agency staff are generally acting in good faith on behalf of the Forest and the public

Many interviewees expressed a belief that Forest Service employees are generally acting in good faith to effectively manage the Forest and respond to the concerns of the public. In the words of interviewees, agency staff have "a genuine desire to be responsive to and interact with the public" and "genuine interest and care for the [Forest's] natural resources." Similar to their comments about management, interviewees often tempered their positive sentiments about agency staff by acknowledging the constraints and challenges facing them. In the words of one interviewee, "the intent is there," but Forest employees are "very underfunded, so they don't have the staff they need to manage the land properly."

It is important to note that a couple of interviewees shared stories of "bad apples" working for the Forest. They said certain individuals behaved in untrustworthy ways, thereby burning bridges—often to the detriment of the Forest Service, who can no longer rely on them to attend public meetings or to produce work products that will be trusted and accepted by members of the public. Interviewees who shared these experiences acknowledged that, although not impossible to overcome, these breaches of trust can have longer-term effects. As one person explained, "It's not that you don't trust them ever again, but it takes a while to build that up again. We have good people in place, we have good monitoring, etc. But the person that did that is still in there and everything he does nobody trusts."

The most commonly suggested idea for improving relationships between agency staff and the public, stakeholders, and Native American tribes is simply more face-to-face interaction. It also appears that interviewees' faith in agency staff has been bolstered by seeing them work with other agencies and groups more, either through partnerships or by participating in collaboratives. Finally, many interviewees expressed a desire for more communication from agency staff about ongoing projects, key successes, and scientific findings.

3. Partnerships are essential

Interviewees internal and external to the Forest Service broadly agreed that partnerships and collaboratives are essential for agency staff to effectively manage the Forest, particularly given the Forest Service's limited funding. Interviewees also widely expressed an interest in creating opportunities to build and expand partnerships. While several agency staff acknowledged the value of these opportunities and the good will it represents, they also said capitalizing on partnership opportunities is challenging due to staff and resource constraints.

Interviewees exhibit a spectrum of opinions on how well the Forest is doing in terms of leveraging partnerships. Some said Forest staff "do well engaging in partnerships and with the many local nonprofits" and that the agency is "trying to be creative" and "share and utilize [its] resources." A handful of interviewees who were participating in collaboratives with the Forest Service made positive comments about them, particularly those from the Greys River Collaborative. Others believe the level at which partners are effectively engaged meets the "bare minimum" or "varies by project," while one person expressed frustration that agency staff did not appear to want to partner.

Nearly all interviewees who mentioned the non-profit Friends of the Bridger-Teton are hopeful that it will fulfill its mission of promoting sustainable stewardship of the Bridger-Teton National Forest through partnerships, problem-solving, outreach, and education. They believe the formation of Friends of the Bridger-Teton was "a good move," that it has "a ton of potential," and it "will really help." One person imagined that the Friends organization might find ways to disperse the resources of partners concentrated in Jackson to other parts of the Forest that would like assistance. A couple interviewees pointed out that the Forest will need to communicate their needs to the public clearly and effectively to set Friends of the Bridger-Teton up for success: "It's a matter of getting the public to understand what our needs are and having a legal vehicle that can galvanize support. We can't just cry about not having enough congressional appropriations. We can tell our story and try to be efficient."

Several interviewees shared additional ideas for how to support the BTNF's efforts to create and strengthen partnerships. A couple interviewees brought up the possibility of the Forest Service hiring a BTNF partnership coordinator. One person thought this role might be more beneficial than a Collaboration Specialist, or that the Collaboration Specialist's role could be redefined to include the skill sets of structuring and managing partnership agreements. Another person saw this role as a means of

protecting vital relationships and ensuring partner organizations benefit from their agreements with the BTNF. They explained: “relationships are hurting because the [Forest Service] can't meet their cost match with the partners, because they don't know what their budget is going to be and make a guess. The government is furloughed and then the non-profit partner loses a huge grant opportunity. There needs to be somebody making sure the partnerships are mutually beneficial and not just getting stuff done in the Forest.”

A few others said there is an opportunity for the Forest to better leverage stewardship contracting authority[1] and good neighbor authority[2] to increase the efficiency of management. They noted that good neighbor authority has the added benefit of allowing counties to reserve any remaining funds from one project for use on the next. One saw this as preferable to the current system, in which—as they put it—excess receipts from Forest Service-run projects end up in a “federal black hole."

4. Management at the District level is working well

When asked whether the Forest should be managed as a whole or whether specific geographic areas need notably different management approaches, most interviewees said they feel District-level management is working well and that no other geographic management zones are needed. In line with this, many interviewees internal and external to the Forest Service commented favorably on management efforts by each of the Forest’s six Ranger Districts, noting that District-level management has been responsive to local needs and interests.

Interviewees cited the relationships they have with local agency staff as a key contributor to the success of District-level management. As one person put it, local Forest Service employees are typically “good people” who “communicate with us, listen to us, and have a relationship with us.” Several District-level agency employees also see relationship building as a critical aspect of their jobs.

While interviewees generally thought District-level management is working well, they saw value in improved communication between agency staff in Jackson and those working in other Districts. This, they said, would allow District-level agency staff to meaningfully respond to questions and ideas when they attend meetings and interface with local communities, and allow agency staff in Jackson to take local knowledge and expertise into account when writing decisions or issuing management orders. It was also mentioned that there are certain Districts that could and should work together better on certain issues, such as grazing and bighorn sheep.

Additionally, several interviewees expressed frustration that District-level efforts are sometimes thwarted by decisions from the Forest Supervisor’s Office or higher levels of agency management. One described it this way: “The intent is always there and sometimes the execution gets held up from the higher level.” Another added that this is in part due to the fact that “directives at the Washington, Regional, and Supervisor levels really don't give the local managers the flexibility and tools to apply those directives, while adjusting for local needs and criteria.” These interviewees expressed a desire for better

[1] Stewardship contracting authority allows the Forest Service “to enter into stewardship contracts or agreements to achieve land management goals for the National Forests or public lands that meet local and rural community needs” (https://www.fs.fed.us/restoration/Stewardship_Contracting/overview.shtml).

[2] Good neighbor authority allows the Forest Service “to enter into agreements with state forestry agencies to do the critical management work to keep our forests healthy and productive” (https://www.fs.fed.us/managing-land/farm-bill/gna).

communication across agency levels to prevent decisions made at the District-level from being overturned.

5. Interviewees want to feel heard by and engage with agency staff at the Supervisor's Office

The majority of interviewees expressed the desire to be heard by and engage with agency staff at the Forest Supervisor's Office. Many people expressed satisfaction with the current level and quality of their engagement with staff in the Supervisor's Office. In the words of interviewees, "The Forest makes a good attempt to work in a collaborative fashion and take input from collaborators, and this goes all the way to the top. Tricia and Derek have made a very concerted effort to listen and take in mind local and state input" and "I can call [the Forest Supervisor] when I have an issue and she'll respond." Others said they feel they have good access to the Supervisor's Office, but that "the normal public that recreates or utilizes the Forest never sees those people."

Other interviewees, particularly those farther away from Jackson, said they feel that the closer you are to Jackson geographically, the more weight your interests, ideas, and concerns will have with the Supervisor's Office. This was true for both agency and non-agency interviewees based in outlying areas. As one agency staff member put it, "That frequency, duration, and intensity [of face-to-face interactions] happens up there but not here. So, [agency staff in Jackson] become increasingly like-minded and further away from us… when we come up it's like we're from Mars." The result is that, as one person put it, "Every District but the Jackson District feels like they're being neglected."

Some interviewees noted that this disconnect between outlying areas and the Supervisor's Office is particularly an issue because, in their perspective, the worldview in Jackson focuses on "preservation" instead of "conservation" and they believe this preservation focus colors decision making for the rest of the Forest. Others noted there is a high concentration of environmental advocacy organizations in Jackson, expressing concern that advocates in Jackson are able to unduly influence Forest-wide policies because of their "loud voices," legal teams, and opportunities to have regular conversations with "the Power Brokers," (i.e., the agency staff with decision-making power located in Jackson). Some people said that decisions coming from the Supervisor's Office almost felt as if they are being handed down from the Jackson community.

Some interviewees noted that the attention and resources concentrated in and around Jackson have material consequences for other parts of the Forest. This contributes to a shared sense of disconnect and neglect by those in other Districts. One agency staff member described it this way: "Seeing all the money pour into Jackson is terrible for employee morale and our County Commissioners notice when there are discrepancies. They'll point out different funding allocations for weed agreements." Another highlighted the fact that the resources in and around Jackson are not simply financial: "Jackson has diversified recreation and also a nine-person trail crew for the summer, and a bunch of non-profit partners, almost to the point where they're running out of projects. Then you go down to Big Piney and Kemmerer, and there's one trails person between them, and no non-profit partners."

Interviewees commonly felt that these challenges could be addressed with improved communication, both within the Forest Service and between the Supervisor's Office and stakeholders, tribes, and the public. A handful of interviewees expressed the desire for more site visits from agency staff working in the Supervisor's Office, so they can build shared understanding with locals about conditions in the field while simultaneously building relationships and trust. Another mentioned the possibility of working with

Friends of the Bridger-Teton to disperse some of the resources concentrated in Jackson to other parts of the Forest that would like assistance.

It is important to note that, when talking about District-level management, a handful of interviewees expressed a somewhat opposing concern about the influence of what one interviewee calls “state and parochial interests” on Forest management. One person said agency staff are “fearful of pushback” from “outspoken county commissioners,” while another suggested that “District Rangers are so keen to please the collaboratives that it appears they're not valuing their employees and their professional analysis of projects.”

6. Frustration with the pace of projects and NEPA

Many interviewees share the perspective that projects on the Forest progress at a relatively slow pace. As one interviewee put it: “This forest has a national reputation for not being able to get stuff done without getting bogged down.” An interviewee internal to the Forest reinforced this perspective, saying: “It's not a healthy perception, and it's been earned.”

Interviewees’ opinions diverge as to why projects move slowly, but they most commonly cited the NEPA process as the cause of delays. Of the majority of interviewees who expressed dissatisfaction with the NEPA process, a couple mentioned the fact that NEPA processes get “picked apart” or endure “micro fussing" by advocacy groups in an attempt to impact the decision. Others told stories of “legacy projects” that take multiple decades to complete. One example shared by several interviewees was of grazing permits on the Upper Green River that had been left in limbo for 20 years because an environmental impact statement was not completed.

Several interviewees offered other theories for why projects move slowly. Some felt that agency employees are fearful of triggering lawsuits from environmental organizations. One interviewee empathized with using deliberation as a defense: “I get it: They're fearful. They don't want to put out decisions because they get beat up and nobody backs them up.” Another person expressed concern that agency staff tend to “slow-walk” projects to which they have personal objections.

A handful of interviewees were not bothered by how slowly projects on the Forest progress. “They're tackling these projects and, even if they're moving at a snail's pace, they're still getting things done,” commented one interviewee. Another thought that, for the most part, “the Forest Service does a good job with NEPA.” Several others expressed the view that the NEPA process is slow by design, and that problems arise when a problem is “fast moving” or when the NEPA process is hurried. Addressing this point, one person specifically expressed appreciation for the slow pace of an ongoing bighorn sheep migration project, saying: “I'm sure there are wildlife advocates who are frustrated, but I'm happy [the Forest Service is] trying to do it right and do it slow, rather than them putting out management orders. They've acknowledged there's no way to police winter closures, so the idea is that this needs to be a community-policed process and getting key skiers to buy in is really important.”

When asked how to improve the speed at which projects progress or the NEPA process, only a few interviewees had concrete suggestions. One agency staff member said that it would be helpful to make sure Forest Service personnel who have the “capacity to simplify and not constantly increase the complexity” of NEPA processes are working with those conducting environmental reviews and that these individuals should have the authority to set limits on the scope of a review. A couple interviewees who found the current NEPA process to be problematic recommended various means of “streamlining” it, including conducting incremental NEPA and relying on categorical exclusions instead of environmental

impact statements and environmental assessments. One person suggested working with more partners to find funding for consultants to assist with the NEPA process. It is worth noting that interviewees' level of concern about the pace of projects seemed to vary according to their level of trust in and understanding of the processes surrounding the decision-making process, suggesting that better bringing people along for the ride in decision making could help alleviate frustration about the pace of projects and the NEPA process.

7. Perspectives on the 1990 Forest Plan and forest plan revision

The Forest is not undertaking forest plan revision at this time and will not for at least another year or two due to federal funding constraints. In light of that, interviewees were not asked any questions particularly regarding the Forest Plan or forest plan revision. However, during the course of interviews, many interviewees referred to the 1990 Forest Plan, expressing a range of opinions regarding how useful the plan is and what should be addressed in a revised Forest Plan.

A handful of interviewees expressed frustration with the 1990 Plan. It was described by one interviewee as "clunky and old." Another elaborated that it has "really outdated language" and is "structured in a way to be almost incomprehensible" because "all the standards and guidelines are intermixed with desired objectives. It's not organized by resource type and is really challenging to find things." A couple interviewees said that the plan is so old that its recommendations are obsolete, and that this has resulted in resource specialists having to make what some think should be Forest-wide decisions. Related to this, some people particularly noted that the plan does not reflect or address the current types and levels of recreation use on the Forest.

In contrast, several interviewees said the current plan is working fine and that "you wouldn't need to redo the entire plan, just tweak a few pieces."

Interviewees expressed a variety of opinions on the process of forest plan revision and what should or should not be included in the new Forest Plan, which one interviewee thought "might be the most significant management plan to date." Some are disappointed and concerned that forest plan revision has been delayed and put off repeatedly; one person said they "bristle" with every new false start. Others said the delay in forest plan revision is just one more result of lack of funding for the Forest and lack of decision-making ability within the larger agency.

There were some concerns from those internal and external to the agency about the forest plan revision process. The need for public education to ensure thoughtful, productive conversations around Forest planning and management emerged as a theme that is discussed further in Section VI. Some people expressed concern that Forest management decisions will be driven by a fear of litigation. Others suggested that they would pursue litigation if their concerns are not addressed, saying that if the Forest engages in a Wild and Scenic River suitability study as part of plan revision and finds any eligible waterway unsuitable, they are prepared to file a lawsuit.

A few interviewees expressed concern about the ability of agency staff to manage forest plan revision alongside their current duties. For example, one said "If we do plan revision, we're not going to hit our timber targets, we're not going to manage our grazing allotments." Another interviewee expressed concern that low levels of trust will make plan revision very difficult: "Our plan is out of date, but what will they put in there? How will it affect everybody? There's no trust! There's no trust. We say we're doing forest plan revision, which could change how management happens. We're going to have to read through every sentence to make sure things work." Another interviewee said, "We'll certainly see engagement

from motorized users, livestock enthusiasts, outfitters, Wyoming Game and Fish, conservation districts, etc.," suggesting the process could be arduous and contentious, so "eat your Wheaties and wear comfortable shoes."

It is worth noting that, when discussing the possibility of a plan revision process, one interviewee highlighted the comprehensive river management process between 2009—2013 as a model of how public outreach could be conducted.

8. Perspectives on specific aspects of Forest management

There were no Forest management programs that a majority of interviewees cited as working particularly well or not well. This appears to be due in part to the fact that this assessment sought out the perspectives of stakeholders who engage with the Forest in different ways and in different locations. Perspectives that were shared for specific management areas are discussed below.

A. Recreation management

A handful of interviewees shared the perspective that recreation management is going well, in spite of budget cuts and it being "challenging because it's so diverse." One interviewee expressed appreciation for how agency staff manage the diversity of uses, describing the "distinct user permissions for wilderness, horses, mountain bikes, etc." as "really cool." Another interviewee described recreation on the Forest as "working better than other people might acknowledge."

Many of these interviewees credited agency staff member Linda Merigliano for recreation management successes. One interviewee sees Linda as embodying what interviewees across the Forest said they liked about local agency staff: "Linda is a really great example of trying to do community outreach and really knowing how this community operates and ticks." Overall, interviewees report that the "staff is doing the best they can with what they have" and have "been working hard to get grants to hire seasonal employees, so [the Forest] can provide recreation-related public engagement, particularly around wilderness and winter recreation." Several interviewees expressed appreciation for summer seasonal employees, particularly trail crews, which one called "a pretty big deal." Several people commented on improvements to maps and signage in English and Spanish, particularly in front country areas.

In contrast, many interviewees expressed concerns about the state of recreation management on the Forest.

As discussed further in Section V, many people said that visitation to and recreation on the Forest continues to increase, suggesting the BTNF needs to modify recreation management to reflect these changes. Additionally, a number of interviewees expressed concern about the state of trail and road maintenance. Further, some expressed concern about limited motorized recreation options, particularly in the Jackson and Greys River regions. One person who shared this concern strongly advocated for more "mixed use" trails that allow motorized use as well as other uses, saying: "The problem is the Forest has been cut up. The hikers say: we need our own trails. The horseback riders: we need our own trails. The ATVs: we need our own trails. The motorcycles: we need single track! The Forest Service can't manage all the special experiences that everyone demands. What if you just said: We have 800 miles of all different types of trails up there, and we're going to make them all mixed use. By quadrupling the number, we'll be dispersed. Why does a horseback rider get to use my trail, but I can't use theirs? They are trying to provide a special experience for everyone, and that model never worked! It's unsustainable."

Another concern mentioned by interviewees is that the Forest Service fails to consider hunting by Native American tribes—a term that encompasses fishing, gathering, and big game hunting—when it authorizes the construction of mountain bike trails, issues boating permits, and expands the ski resorts.

Additionally, a few interviewees felt that recreation receives too much emphasis on the Forest.

Most of the ideas interviewees shared about how to improve recreation management centered around enhancing public education and information to reduce confusion, thereby increasing compliance and minimizing conflict. These suggestions include improving directional and interpretive signage, expanding the Forest Ambassador program, creating more complete, concise maps in partnership with other organizations, and publishing more materials in Spanish. These and other ideas are detailed below in Section VI.

B. Wildlife habitat management

Many interviewees felt that wildlife habitat management seems to be working well overall. Several expressed appreciation for how the BTNF handles closures, which one interviewee praised as "a surgical approach to management rather than a blanket approach."

A handful of interviewees expressed strong concerns about specific aspects of wildlife habitat management. These include the risks of fatal grizzly bear encounters on the north end of the Forest as grizzly populations increase, the risks to wildlife migration corridors and winter ungulate habitat posed by development, and interactions between wild and domestic sheep. A few interviewees felt that there are too many outfitters working on the Forest, and perceive some outfitters as not adhering to rules and regulations or having poor ethics, particularly when it comes to hunting mule deer and bear in Greys River. Several interviewees mentioned the Canada Lynx as an example of what one interviewee described as "single-species management," in which higher-level management directives can be implemented in a way that conflicts with local conditions and needs. One interviewee described it: "Because the Forest Service has to provide habitat for Lynx, it makes it really hard to do vegetation management, removing conifer encroachment, and removing beetle-kill trees. You can't do these projects because then you're removing potential Lynx habitat."

When asked, only one interviewee shared a suggestion for improving wildlife habitat management. They felt that the Forest Service is doing a good job of convening a working group around protecting Bighorn sheep migration and mitigating the influence of backcountry recreation on migration, particularly from Jackson Hole Mountain Resort, suggesting that process may be a useful model for other wildlife issues.

C. Vegetation and wildland fire management

Many interviewees internal and external to the Forest Service expressed interest in conducting more vegetation management and fuel reduction projects, particularly in the southern region of the Forest. Underlying the interest in these topics were three key goals: mitigating the risk of catastrophic wildfire, stimulating local economies by reinvigorating the timber industry, and addressing the threat of noxious weeds. Interviewees diverged, however, about what an appropriate type and degree of management would look like, expressing disagreement and sometimes confusion.

Interviewees acknowledged some positive aspects of the Forest's current vegetation management and wildfire mitigation efforts. Some mentioned that the Forest Service has a decent strategy to implement the vegetation management program and that the wildland fire and the fuels programs are run very well.

One interviewee commended the BTNF for amending the 1990 Forest Plan in 2004 to allow wildland fire use, a tool for wildland fire management that is common practice among national parks but not among national forests.

Interviewees revealed a key source of disagreement and confusion when asked what might improve vegetation and wildland fire management on the Forest, often expressing conflicting beliefs about the impacts of forest treatments of varying scales to the Forest's ecological health and the risk of wildfire. Several interviewees expressed the view that timber sales completed during the 1970s have helped protect the Forest against beetle kill. Others are unsure or feel that the negative impacts to wildlife from timber harvesting outweigh the perceived benefits.

The 1990 Forest Plan and the Forest's history with the timber industry provide important context for the disagreement and confusion around vegetation management, forest health, and wildfire risk. Some interviewees remember when Star Studs was producing 50,000 or more board feet annually and a timber mill in Afton employed 100 people. However, a few interviewees acknowledged that expectations have been and may still be unrealistic regarding timber production: "When the BTNF's current plan was put together, it focused heavily on timber production. It's commonly understood and agreed upon that we'll never meet those targets. Because of the 1982 Planning Rule, they had to set a standard for timber production that we knew we would never meet." Others feel that the BTNF and surrounding communities do not have adequate infrastructure to harvest and process timber.

Interviewees also cited the lack of agency staff and funding as key limiting factors on vegetation management efforts. One person pointed out that the BTNF has "four technicians and a temporary program manager to do vegetation management process on 3.4 million acres." A couple interviewees felt that one way to expand the Forest Service's capacity for vegetation management was through partnerships with the state of Wyoming and other entities, and through better communication with the public. One interviewee expressed support for this model, noting that "collectively, the agency, the states, everyone who is involved is coming to realize that a well-managed forest community is better for not just fire, but for all the multiple uses."

D. Grazing

Interviewees commonly expressed the view that grazing is a controversial issue, although only a handful of interviewees said more about it than that. Of those that did elaborate, some saw grazing permittees as a group with a lot of political power that perceives decreases in grazing as "a fundamental attack on their livelihood" and that does not want to "see any changes that reduce their ability to graze, build infrastructure, etc." Others said grazers and grazing are under threat from groups that "want to get rid of every land use they don't like." One interviewee shared frustration about having to independently prove to agency staff that their cattle were not causing problems in riparian areas: "It felt like the cows were being scapegoated, because you can see them." Despite interviewees mentioning the potential for conflict about grazing, it seems as if they are generally comfortable with it, as long as the activity is managed properly "to avoid major impacts that will persist over the long time."

The lack of immediate concerns related to grazing may be due in part to what a handful of interviewees perceive to be declines in grazing in some areas of the Forest. Interviewees expressed varying levels of concern about these declines, with some asserting that "grazing is not a big deal" because "most of the allotments have been bought out by conservation groups" and others saying that the fact that the Forest holds the highest amount of vacant grazing allotments in the country is a "title [the Forest Service] shouldn't be proud to own."

Several interviewees shared various ideas about why these declines are taking place. Some noted that conservation organizations are buying grazing permits. A couple interviewees felt that livestock management on the Forest has become so complex that permittees now must be experts in science and in the complex ways the Forest Service makes decisions in order to operate. Another person mentioned that predation from wolves and bears had caused nearly half of the Forest's permittees to stop running cattle on an allotment.

Several interviewees reported that local agency staff are managing grazing programs well. Some said the agency is doing a "tremendous job" and expressed appreciation for being able to conduct site visits with agency staff in order to "see the same thing at the same time on the ground." In contrast, however, a couple interviewees shared stories of agency staff who communicate poorly with permittees, including changing their permits without giving them advance notice or explanation.

When asked what ideas they had for improving grazing management on the Forest, few interviewees shared concrete ideas. However, a few interviewees reported good experiences with grazing collaboratives, working with local District Rangers and Rangeland Conservationists who had been working on the same District for some time, and conducting field visits with agency staff. One interviewee described positive experiences working with the University of Wyoming to develop long-term monitoring programs and working with the National Public Lands Council to develop a memorandum of understanding for voluntary, cooperative monitoring with the Forest Service. These interviewees suggested these are good models for future grazing management efforts.

E. Minerals, oil, and gas

Some interviewees mentioned mineral extraction, or mining, and oil and gas development. However, while they often acknowledged that these uses tend to be controversial, few felt the topic was worth discussing in depth. Oil and gas activities were raised mostly in the past tense, pointing to the fact that Big Piney is the only District that has active oil and gas leases. Overall, the lack of oil and gas activity on the Forest was considered a subject that most constituents could agree on: "I think there's general agreement on minimized oil and gas and mining activities—industrial activities—even among motorized and mechanized users, at least on the north end of the Forest." Oil and gas drilling were seen by some as incompatible with uses that some interviewees consider to be dominant, such as recreation and wildlife habitat.

Several interviewees expressed concerns related to oil and gas leasing on the Forest. One person commented that the Forest Service need to "be more careful about making [oil and gas] leases," expressing frustration about having to buy back leases that they believe should not have been let, such as on the headwaters of the Hoback. Another person saw leasing processes as being "famous for excluding the public." A third shared a story about the Wyoming Range Oil and Gas Leasing Project. They reported that the county, the state of Wyoming, and the Forest Service had worked closely to develop a recommendation that the southern end of the Forest should be open to leasing, but the decision was overturned by the USDA Undersecretary in order to take decision-making power away from the county and the state.

When asked, no interviewees shared suggestions for improving minerals, oils, and gas leasing and management on the Forest.

V. Forest Management: Key Concerns

Interviewees were asked if there were any aspects of the Forest's management about which they are particularly concerned. The following are key themes that emerged:

1. Concerns about limited Forest Service funding and personnel

A majority of interviewees saw funding as the primary challenge facing the Forest Service and its ability to engage in planning, management, and outreach activities. They described the agency as "grossly underfunded" and "financially strangled," while being saddled with what several interviewees called a "huge" responsibility of managing the 3.4 million acre national forest. A couple people were aware that borrowing money from other programs to fund fire response and mitigation consumes a substantial portion of the Forest Service's budget and acknowledged that this was hampering the agency's effectiveness. Another pointed to political gridlock in Washington as the source of these budget shortfalls: "Are we going to be able to get funding to do the things that need to be done? It's such a mess in Congress it seems almost impossible to get support for anything."

Nearly every interviewee who raised concerns about funding expressed a degree of empathy about the agency's plight. However, frustration with the agency's persistent lack of resources had, for some, hardened into "skepticism of the Forest Service's ability to implement their plans in the parts of the Forest like Big Piney and Kemmerer, where there are fewer resources." One person commented: "I think our Forest Supervisor Tricia is a nice gal and does her best and I think Nora [Rasure] at the regional level is a good gal, but there's something broken where they can't make decisions and don't have money to do anything." Another was more direct: "They're going to implode, eventually."

Interviewees who expressed concern about lack of funding almost always made a connection to how reduced budgets translate into reduced staff. One person heard that "the [Jackson] office is almost like a ghost town." An agency staff member echoed their concern: "One of the challenges is I currently have no permanent employees that live within 35 miles of my office…This weighs on me at night—keeping this office going." Several interviewees perceive agency staff as "over-taxed" and not getting adequate time in the field, which erodes their authority as resource experts. One person described this clearly: "Boots on the ground equates to expertise in the field. You understand vegetation communities better if your feet are dirty, then if you're in front of your computer."

Interviewees concerned with these funding and personnel constraints perceive them as directly and negatively impacting the Forest Service's capacity to fulfill its mission. One person pointed out that "staff vacancies mean you don't have the knowledge and expertise to manage." Interviewees also documented the diverse and cascading impacts of lean budgets, which ranged from the slow pace at which projects advanced, degrading trails and roads due to deferred maintenance, and difficulties with the enforcement of rules and regulations to challenges with maintaining relationships and partnerships.

Other than acts of Congress that would increase funding for the Forest Service, interviewees widely saw partnerships and coordination with other government entities as key for addressing funding and personnel shortages and expressed an interest in seeing the Forest better leverage partnerships as a way to get things done. One interviewee pointed out the value in "honest and transparent" communication from agency staff about their limitations, so that stakeholders, tribes, and the public have reasonable expectations of what the Forest Service has the capacity to achieve.

2. Concerns about agency staff turnover

Many interviewees internal and external to the Forest Service expressed concern about the rate of turnover among agency staff. One person cited turnover as "one of the things that frustrates me the most working with [the Forest Service]," because of the difficulty of developing new working relationships and carrying projects forward that had been left unfinished.

Interviewees internal and external to the Forest Service agree that keeping agency staff in place is vital for effective management and trusting relationships for a number of reasons. First, an interviewee pointed out that there is a learning curve for employees new to an area: "it takes a new [District] Ranger two years to figure out what everybody has going on." Second, relationships take time. As one agency staff member put it: "I've been here three years, and in order to be trusted and respected here you have to be here for a minimum of 50." Another person summed it up: "There is no feel-good process that will take the place of time."

The departure of District Rangers seems to be particularly destabilizing, according to some interviewees, as they are often seen as key conduits for local needs and interests, as discussed in Section IV(4), under "Management at the District level is working well." New District Rangers may have to make important decisions before locals perceive them to have "the pulse of the community" or before locals know them well enough to anticipate how they will respond to different issues. Certain Districts seem to struggle more with employee retention than others. One interviewee described the Big Piney Ranger District as a "revolving door" in which all but one staff member had worked there for three years or less.

Interviewees had few concrete suggestions for addressing concerns about agency staff turnover. This is likely due in part to the perception that frequent turnover stems from agency policy, which is not within the control of those external to the Forest Service. One agency staff member mentioned that targeted recruitment can result in longer agency staff tenures, adding that, in small and rural communities, it can "get lonely pretty fast" for single people and be "extremely challenging for spouses [of agency staff] to find employment."

Although they did not directly connect it to the issue of turnover, most interviewees noted how good communication is a critical skill for agency staff. New or newly arrived agency staff will need particularly good communication skills in order to start building connections with their communities. One interviewee pointed out that partners, particularly Friends of the Bridger-Teton, can help agency staff learn about a community's needs and how they like to be engaged. "I think the Friends group will be helpful in laying the ground work for getting into some of these communities…It's like, where do I hold a meeting in Afton, and what newspapers do I post in? It's going to be important that folks feel like they're heard."

3. Concerns about regional population growth and rising visitation

Many interviewees expressed notable concern about rapid regional growth and increasing visitation to the Forest and related impacts. Several interviewees described the regional growth as "exponential," while another described the Forest's growing popularity as "one of the largest tourist booms we've ever seen." As a result, some people feel "the use on certain areas of the Forest is starting to outpace what the administration is capable of handling."

Most interviewees point out that these impacts are not happening uniformly across the Forest, but rather are concentrated in popular front country areas (such as Teton Pass, Cache Creek, Curtis Canyon, the Big Sandy Opening, the Turpin Meadow Ranch Trailhead, Squaw Creek, and the Greys River corridor) and in

“spillover” areas adjacent to Grand Teton and Yellowstone National Parks. That said, interviewees also said that many wilderness areas, particularly those easily accessible from Jackson, are also feeling the pressure. Several interviewees noted that technological advances have increased the range of snowmobiles and mountain bikes, which, in turn, increases their impacts: “It's particularly acute on the Jackson and Big Piney Districts…The number of snowmobilers are stagnant, but they can go much farther.”

Reported impacts of increased visitation and recreation vary widely, ranging from serious congestion at popular trailheads, people throwing “huge parties” in the woods outside of Jackson, and people living in the Forest because housing in Jackson is too expensive, to fatal grizzly bear encounters, dangerously eroded trails, and skier-caused avalanches that block highways. Some interviewees said they believe some tribal and Spanish-speaking communities feel less comfortable in and have begun avoiding certain parts of the Forest because of how they expect to be treated by other people in these areas. Many of these impacts, according to interviewees, result from either poor understanding of or poor compliance with rules, regulations, and basic safety precautions by Forest visitors and users. Interviewees commonly saw this as either an education or enforcement problem for which agency staff are at least partly responsible. As with most discussions of Forest management, interviewees were generally empathetic to the agency’s limitations in this regard, saying things such as: “The Forest Service doesn't have the resources to put a babysitter [in Cache Creek], but they've done the best they can.”

Underlying these concerns were often questions about the impacts of increasing recreation and visitation on wildlife. “A lot of folks would like to know more about the wildlife impacts from recreation,” commented one interviewee, expressing an interest we heard from many other interviewees. They added, “The Bridger-Teton is kind of ground zero for rec increase overlapping with historic migration corridors.” Another interviewee discussed the challenge of determining what those impacts are: “The impact to wildlife, vegetation, and habitat is nonlinear and incremental. Once you've built a trail, what's the difference between five, ten, or twenty people walking on it? Once you've crossed a threshold, something happens where the area's no longer useful for a wildlife species. It's about resilience. That threshold's very important for different species.” One interviewee inferred that a “precautionary approach” to management is needed because “we still don't understand enough about the impacts of people using the land or the impacts of climate change. That's what leads me to think: Gosh, should we try to have more [Forest Service] staff to observe what's going on in the backcountry, have more science, have more data.” All in all, it seems like people across the Forest have an interest in better understanding the impact of increased visitation on wildlife.

As noted above, interviewees saw improved education and enforcement as being potentially helpful in addressing these challenges. Interviewees proposed education efforts ranging from basic information about what a national forest is and where the Forest’s boundaries are to topics like backcountry etiquette (i.e., how to store food properly, how to dispose of waste, where and what type of camping is permitted on the Forest, what activities require permits, and right-of-way on trails). They also noted that these types of education efforts could also improve compliance and reduce the need for active enforcement. Many interviewees saw value in the idea of having partners assist with education and enforcement efforts, mentioning that outfitters and guides could help educate their clients about how to behave in the Forest and that the Ambassador Program could be expanded so enforcement duties are not solely the responsibility of agency staff.

Many interviewees mentioned that increased funding would help address issues with rising visitation and recreation on the Forest. More funding would allow agency staff to train partners, hire and train seasonal

field workers who could interact with visitors during the busiest months, and support the production of educational materials.

One interviewee proposed that the agency create “pilot sites” in high use areas throughout the Forest. These would enable agency staff to test the effectiveness of different visitor management strategies, such as reservations for campsites or dispersed camping. “Human beings are great at solving our own problems if we're allowed to experiment. We've got enough different areas in the District we can learn from each other.”

4. Concerns about motorized recreation

Interviewees commonly felt that there are strong and often divergent perspectives among Forest stakeholders and the public regarding the appropriate extent of and locations for motorized recreation infrastructure. Although interviewees commonly referred to “hardcore” wilderness or multiple use advocates who take somewhat one-sided stances on this topic, their own perspectives rarely represented extreme views on motorized use. No one expressed the perspective that motorized recreation should be either totally unregulated or banned entirely from the Forest.

Current conversations around motorized recreation are somewhat influenced by the recent Wyoming Public Lands Initiative (WPLI) process. Several interviewees had participated in WPLI and largely saw the conversations concerning motorized recreation as unproductive. Referring to discussions about motorized use, one interviewee described participants who would “position and posture and want the Forest to be just for them and their wanted experience,” instead of trying to seek solutions on which everyone could agree. Another interviewee echoed this sentiment: “the collaborative efforts of some user groups was to draw a line in the sand… [people advocating for motorized use] came in and said: ‘We don't want to lose one square acre of access.’ This gave us nothing to work with.” Another interviewee not involved in WPLI echoed their frustrations: “Every time there's a possibility of restricting [motorized] use it creates chaos. There's a part of the community that feels confined.”

To that point, several interviewees expressed concern that motorized recreation users in the Jackson and Greys River area face a “shortage of motorized trail options” or are “limited,” particularly when compared with some southern portions of the Forest or areas within the Caribou-Targhee National Forest. A lack of motorized accessible rails was also a concern near Big Piney, where, according to one interviewee, there are “a lot of roads, but 36 miles of designated motorized trails,” in an area where “typically, you would have 200-600 miles.”

One challenge interviewees mentioned in regards to motorized recreation is where to draw the line once it has begun. As one person said, “The OHVs have thrown a wrench in things, because people want to ride side-by-sides on trails. When you do that, people wonder why they can't drive their pickups on those roads. Where do you stop? There's not an easy answer for that.”

Wilderness designations also emerged as an area of tension related to motorized recreation. Mountain bikers and snowmachiners currently enjoy legal access for recreation in wilderness study areas, opportunities that will disappear if these areas are designated as wilderness. This situation, according to some interviewees, has led these recreationists to feel “threatened.” Two interviewees proposed addressing this issue by “setting aside the technical definition” of wilderness and focusing on the “values” wilderness represents, such as opportunities for solitude and wildlife habitat. One described the Commissary Ridge project near the head of the Greys River as an exemplar of this “roadless not wilderness concept.” Conflicts over wilderness designations appear to be less of a concern on the

southern end of the BTNF, which has fewer wilderness areas and which one interviewee commended for "a good balance of roadless and roaded areas."

Those less in favor of motorized recreation often still shared an appreciation for diverse uses (including motorized use) of the Forest, as discussed in Section III(2) under "Diversity of opportunities and uses." As one person put it, "I'm one of those who don't four-wheel—I despise them—but they have nowhere to go. Give them a place to go, and we'll all be better neighbors." One person outlined how motorized recreation is one way of providing access to the Forest for those with limited mobility: "We also have an aging population, so people before who hiked or rode a horse in now can't access the Forest. They can't get on their horses, but they can climb into a side-by-side. So, folks age out of opportunities and experiences they used to enjoy. I'm not saying everything has to be motorized, but it's something I've observed and have heard. When you see people stare off into the distance and remember the good old days, it's hard to say you can't go there. They see lifestyles and things slipping away and that's one more change for them. When you close a trail that's there, it can...there's a lot more behind it. The loss of a lifestyle."

When discussing motorized recreation and related tensions and concerns, interviewees struggled to generate concrete suggestions for addressing them. However, it appears that some interviewees believe that the desire to productively engage in conversation, to collaborate, and to accommodate different user groups could be harnessed for these issues. A handful of people mentioned collaboration and "open discussion" as a way forward, in spite of the challenges associated with WPLI. Several people added that a focus on how people value the Forest, rather than how they use it, might help in these discussions: "How do we understand what those values are and how do we see if you can't put them into a plan that allows them to value the Forest as highly as they value it now?" Another person gave an example of a good faith effort by the motorized community to voluntarily reduce competing use conflicts: "There's a place on Teton Pass that we could snowmobile, but all the locals decide not to go there out of respect for the skiers." One person suggested generally increasing the amount of mixed-use trails in the Forest, particularly in the Greys River area, suggesting this would create more motorized options and also generally help spread out recreationists.

5. Concerns about road and trail maintenance

A majority of interviewees expressed concern about trail and road maintenance throughout the Forest. Many of them connected the degraded conditions of roads and trails to the agency's broader funding and personnel challenges. One internal interviewee pointed out that the BTNF is prohibited by law from maintaining some roads: "We have roads that were built for logging 30-40 years ago, and it was written into the NEPA that they can't be maintained. They're *de facto* UTV/ATV roads now, and recreational users want them maintained. But, by law, we can't maintain them."

Interviewees identified impacts associated with lack of trail and road maintenance ranging from erosion to downed trees. These issues, they suggested, in turn impact the behavior of users. People indicated there are trails they now avoid due to lack of maintenance, saying things such as: "There's trails I don't go up anymore because it would take you a week—I don't want to spend all day crawling over or under downed trees on a horse." Others suggested people often go off trail to avoid "sketchy areas," even on popular trails, which results in impacts on other areas.

A couple interviewees expressed frustration that resources disproportionately seem to be going toward maintenance of front country trails. This was explained in part by other interviewees, who noted that trail maintenance in wilderness areas is challenging because of the prohibition on motors. Trail maintenance

progresses at a slower pace when trail crews cannot drive motorized vehicles to a site or use chainsaws to clear fallen trees.

Many interviewees cited increased funding as necessary for purchasing the equipment needed and hiring the staff, including seasonal trail crews, to maintain roads and trails. Interviewees saw partnerships as a viable means of marshalling some of the necessary funds, equipment, and human resources. One interviewee noted that wilderness outfitters are "expending considerable effort with crews, cross-cut saws, etc., each year to assist USFS with trail clearance along many miles of Wilderness Trail System," adding "It would be helpful if the agency occasionally showed some acknowledgement and appreciation." In addition to wilderness outfitters, interviewees suggested Wyoming State Trails, Tread Lightly, and Stewards of the Greys might also be good partners for trail and road maintenance.

6. Concerns about elk feedgrounds

A number of interviewees shared concerns about elk feedgrounds, suggesting they are encouraging the proliferation and transmission of diseases including chronic wasting disease, brucellosis, and hoof rot. Some interviewees noted that a complicating factor is other federal and state agencies as well as landowners are involved in or implicated by this issue, so changes require coordination and buy-in from multiple parties with different objectives and interests. If the BTNF changes the management of or shuts down the feedgrounds within its boundaries, animals can still travel to the elk refuge operated by the US Fish and Wildlife Service and potentially face similar risks. "Elk don't know about jurisdictional boundaries," joked one interviewee. Furthermore, the Bureau of Land Management has special use permits for feedgrounds, which they may or may not choose to use. Further, there is concern that the State Commission overseeing Wyoming Game and Fish simply "isn't ready to shut down feedgrounds." If all feedgrounds are shut down, the question is where the herds will end up. One person added, "There's really low tolerance from the landowners in this community about having elk and deer on their lands…You add another grazing animal onto their lands and it takes away land for their cows. You're also risking CWD spreading to their animals."

Not all interviewees who talked about feedgrounds see them as problematic. One interviewee felt that the feedgrounds provide a valuable service to the animals while providing a unique opportunity for humans to view wildlife. "I can't find a person around that doesn't love the elk feeding program, because you get to see them. The herds are big and massive and you have pregnant, starving elk, and seeing them getting fed is a great thing."

Interviewees did not have any concrete suggestions for addressing concerns about elk feedgrounds.

VI. Stakeholder and Public Engagement

Interviewees were asked questions about how the Forest is doing in terms of engagement and who should be engaged and how. Additionally, as noted above in Section IV, when asked about Forest management, interviewees commonly said more effective education and engagement is key and that engagement could be improved.

When discussing engagement, people commonly spoke to the importance of face-to-face interaction and encouraged the Forest Service to ensure there are productive forums, such as public meetings, where stakeholders and the public can learn about key issues and options and share their concerns and ideas. Additionally, a number of interviewees mentioned collaborative engagement as an achievable goal; several did not feel that agency staff had embraced it as a "priority or core value."

These themes and others that emerged regarding stakeholder and public engagement are discussed below:

1. Who needs to be engaged?

All interviewees were asked who they think should be involved in Forest management and planning. In response, most people said every person has a right to be involved in and/or have a say in these decisions, acknowledging that the BTNF is "America's forest" and hosts visitors from all over the nation and world. Some felt, however, that local perspectives should be given more weight, because local people live in and with the Forest, are directly affected by it, and have a better grasp of conditions on the ground.

A number of people said that the Forest Service communicates well with local stakeholder groups, especially "special interests," and that the agency could improve communication with national interests and the national public. Participants readily admitted this is a difficult balance to achieve.

People generally expressed a strong interest in cultivating a more engaged public to ensure that critical conversations dictating the Forest's future are well informed. They specifically mentioned a need to balance the voices of "squeaky wheels," with the perspectives and interests of others. Related to this, people often emphasized how difficult it is to get members of the public—which people sometimes called the "general user" or "missing middle"—to meaningfully engage. It is worth noting that this perceived lack of engagement was not seen as an issue in the Jackson community; interviewees noted people in Jackson tend to be very involved. As an example of this, one interviewee joked that a new elk refuge manager moved to Jackson and did not realize "he was living among 2,000 wildlife biologists who all had opinions on his job."

2. Face-to-face interaction with agency staff is valued and should be increased

Throughout interviews, people commonly expressed appreciation and/or desire for face-to-face interaction with Forest Service staff. Related to this, they commonly identified a need for increased opportunities for stakeholders and members of the public to meet and provide feedback to agency staff, particularly outside of the context of scoping and other formal events. Often, these suggestions involve developing a stronger Forest Service presence in communities and out in the field. Taking a more informal, personal approach, interviewees thought, could facilitate relationship building and information sharing, increase compliance, and help strengthen the Forest's "brand."

Some ideas interviewees shared for facilitating face-to-face interaction include:

- *Send agency staff to community events*. Multiple interviewees saw value in having agency staff participate in community events by tabling, hosting activities, or simply showing up. They felt that providing opportunities for the public to have informal interactions with agency staff in their own communities would remove some of the logistical barriers to interaction and have rippling positive impacts. The most important impacts would be increased trust and stronger relationships.
- *Establish a Forest "ride along" program*. A couple interviewees mentioned opportunities for "ride alongs," in which members of the public are invited to join agency staff when they conduct field reviews, monitoring, and general reconnaissance. The one-on-one time between ride-along participants helps strengthen relationships and allows participating members of the public to feel heard and valued, while the site visit increases shared understanding of complex conditions on the ground. Establishing a ride-along program would require creating a list of people to invite with diverse views and a way of matching these people to relevant and logistically-feasible ride-along opportunities.
- *Empower partners to be ambassadors for the Forest*. The Forest might consider expanding a formal program, such as the Ambassador programs at Teton Pass and Cache Creek Trailhead, that trains official partners and members of the public to share information about the Forest and assist with enforcement. Another idea interviewees suggested was that agency staff could share interpretive and educational materials with outfitters and guides as part of the permitting process, so they are equipped to discuss aspects of the Forest's history, management, and planning, and provide instruction on Forest etiquette, rules, and regulations.

3. Public meetings are valued and can be improved

Many interviewees expressed appreciation for and saw value in the public meetings agency staff have hosted to date. They commonly view them as a good way for participants to learn about what is happening on the Forest and voice ideas, opinions, and questions. They also often identified opportunities for improving how BTNF meetings are designed and run. Making these improvements, they suggested, will help increase the number and diversity of meeting participants, make sure agency staff receive meaningful input on projects, and improve opportunities for participants to feel heard, ask questions, and engage in discussions that will lead to a greater shared understanding. As one interviewee pointed out: "it's hard to keep people engaged unless they actually feel listened to."

The ideas interviewees shared for how to improve meetings, planning processes, and other Forest events include:

- *Schedule events at times that are most convenient for the target audience*—which may be during the evening or on weekends—not at times most convenient for agency staff.
- *Provide opportunities for participants to share ideas anonymously*, during meetings or elsewhere. As one interviewee said, having to voice an unpopular opinion in a room full of your neighbors can dissuade someone from sharing their honest thoughts.
- *Send agency staff who have the right types of knowledge and the authority to answer basic participant questions and respond to comments*. In situations where this is not possible, they proposed creating a transparent, consistent process by which agency staff can "elevate [questions] up the chain until an answer is received" and share that response with the public.
- *Consider having trained facilitators run meetings and/or planning processes*. A few people mentioned having a "strong" third-party neutral facilitator could address problems during

meetings such as "grandstanding" or difficulties with sticking to an agenda. These individuals expressed sincere appreciation and gratitude for facilitators, particularly those involved in the Greys River Collaborative. Another encouraged the Forest Service to send their employees to facilitation training or hire an external facilitator before they embark on forest plan revision. It is important to note that if a facilitator is selected, they must have the trust of stakeholders and the public. A couple interviewees reported they get an "icky feeling" around certain facilitators because they treat people "like a three-year-old," or expressed concern that they have experienced facilitators who seemed to be pushing for a specific outcome or did not ask the "critical questions."

4. Emails, phone calls, and face-to-face interactions are effective means of getting the word out, and can be augmented

Interviewees recommended using many approaches to spread the word about events, proposed changes, and opportunities for education and engagement related to the Forest's planning and management. In addition to face-to-face interactions, phone calls, and emails, which were all generally considered to be effective, they suggested:

- *Sharing information via radio*, such as via 20-second blurbs or regular updates provided by the local District Ranger, like those given by former Greys River District Ranger Mesia Nyman. Weekday Wake-up is a morning program that is broadcast on several AM stations throughout the Starr Valley and would welcome updates from the BTNF.
- *Sending press releases and stories to local papers*, such as the Pinedale Roundup, Starr Valley Independent, Kemmerer Gazette, and Jackson Hole News and Guide. Publishing information in the Casper Starr was not seen as effective.
- *Updating the BTNF website so that information is easier to access*. One interviewee recommended the websites of Region 5 and national forests in California as good examples.
- *Leveraging Facebook* to get information out to partners' networks and small communities, particularly Big Piney and Kemmerer.
- *Leveraging local chambers of commerce* to help reach the business community.
- *Sharing information via podcasts* that reach different audiences. One interviewee recommended reaching hunters via "Hunt Talk Radio, Randy Newberg Unfiltered" or "Meat Eater."
- *Sending mailings and post cards* reminding recipients to attend upcoming Forest Service events, even though they are expensive, since some people are not likely to get information online.

5. Increase and enhance directional and interpretive signage

A handful of interviewees commented that signage on the Forest, although generally good in front country areas, could be improved. They saw improving signage as a low-cost opportunity for increasing compliance and providing a safer, richer experience for Forest visitors. Some ideas for improving trail markers include increasing the number of signs identifying sanctioned trails and differentiating trail types, particularly in Big Piney, and installing aluminum signs with trail names, like those found in National Parks, in backcountry areas. One person noted that interpretive signs could be enhanced with more information about the roles Native Americans play in regional history and their influence on place names, such as Jenny Lake and Togwotee Pass. Interviewees said current efforts at providing information in Spanish are appreciated, and more would be particularly helpful in Teton County.

6. Partner with other agencies, organizations, and businesses to produce outreach materials that are complete and concise

Some interviewees said that outreach materials will be most useful to visitors and have the best chance at improving compliance if they collect all relevant information—where to camp, where roads are, outdoor ethics—in one place. A successful example of this is the Jackson and Blackrock Dispersed Camping and Motor Vehicle Access Project, which provides all of these details in a single map or pamphlet. These materials may be produced in partnership with businesses and other agencies to ensure vital details are included.

7. Educational and interpretive programming is helpful and can be increased

Interviewees commonly felt that more educational and interpretive programming would be quite helpful for the Forest. They identified the following key topics as valuable areas of focus for public education materials and programming. Many of these topics, which are listed in no particular order, could help engage multiple target audiences, including the "missing middle," Spanish-speaking communities, youth, and Native Americans.

- What a national forest is and how it differs from other types of federal, state, and municipal land management types
- What the boundaries and mandates of the Forest and other adjacent public lands are
- How members of the public can use the Forest and the types of activities that are permitted in different parts of the Forest and why
- Responsibilities associated with visiting the Forest (e.g. Leave No Trace ethics, bear safety, etc.)
- The ecological and human history of the region, dating back to prehistoric times
- The impacts of different recreation activities on the Forest's wildlife, flora, soils, etc.
- How different kinds of wildlife utilize the Forest
- What vegetation management is generally, what the Forest Service's vegetation management involves, and the science informing the Forest Service's vegetation management
- How the Forest Service uses fire as part of its vegetation management strategy
- The role of fire in various types of ecosystems—past, present and future
- The economic benefits conferred to local business owners by the Forest and adjacent public lands
- How members of the public can share ideas, concerns, and questions with the Forest Service, and what they should expect in terms of follow-up
- How projects on the Forest are initiated and how they progress
- Information about ongoing or past projects on the Forest, particularly to evaluate their outcomes
- Examples of successful projects or programs on the Forest

8. Ideas for engaging specific communities

During the course of interviews, people were asked to reflect on strategies for engaging core constituencies, particularly those they feel should be better engaged. Interviewees shared the following ideas related to engaging and consulting with Native American tribes, the Latino community, and youth:

A. Engaging and consulting with Native American tribes

The following are some initial suggestions about how to better engage and consult with Native American tribes with an interest in the Forest. More work is necessary to accurately capture different tribes' interests in and perspectives on the Forest, and how they would prefer to be engaged around and consulted on these topics.

- Actively engage more agency staff in working with tribes and on the Forest's Heritage Program. Currently, one agency staff member is responsible for working with as many as 26 tribes.
- As a matter of courtesy, use the term "tribal engagement," rather than "public engagement," when working with tribes.
- Work with tribes to ensure agency staff are trained in tribal treaty rights, inherent rights, trust responsibilities, and what these legal sideboards means for them as managers. Explore the possibility of sending agency employees to the Shoshone-Bannock tribe's annual treaty rights seminar for tribal members, which typically occurs in April.
- Work with tribes to create strong, consistent consultation pathways.
- In addition to facilitating connections between tribes and Forest Service "Line Managers," facilitate connections between tribes and Forest Service Resource Managers, such as archeologists, big game biologists, and cultural resource managers.
- Conduct consultations in the field, as well as in conference rooms, to ensure accurate data is recorded about where and how tribal members are using the lands.
- Be aware of the fact that some tribes consider themselves to be "resident" tribes and feel they should be engaged before consultations with "visitor" tribes.
- Explore the possibility of holding annual meetings with the Forest Service, the Shoshone-Bannock tribe, and the Eastern Shoshone tribe, so participants may learn from each other's questions and discover common concerns.
- Prepare agency staff to work with tribes on a review of their existing management documents, as a result of the outcome of US Supreme Court case Herrera vs. Wyoming.
- Continue to support the Blackrock Field Camp.
- Explore the possibility of sending agency staff to popular tribal events, such as powwows or community feeds, so they can build relationships and hear inter-tribal perspectives.
- Explore the possibility of partnering with other natural resource management agencies and tribes to host a series of "community fairs" to streamline information sharing. These events would enable tribal communities to provide information to multiple agencies who are seeking similar information from tribes all at once.

B. Engaging Teton County's Latino communities

Currently, 15 percent of the population of Teton County and 27 percent of the Town of Jackson is of Latino descent, with most from rural Mexico. A handful of interviewees expressed concern that Teton County's Latino communities were not being engaged in Forest planning, management, and outreach activities as much or as well as they should be, and interviewees from the agency expressed an interest in better engaging this community. The following are some initial suggestions about how to better engage Teton County's Latino communities; more work will be necessary to understand their interests in and perspectives on the Forest, and how they would prefer to be engaged around these issues. Many of these suggestions are also applicable to engaging the "missing middle."

- Understand that Teton County's Latino communities are not represented by one or two individuals or organizations.
- Publish outreach and educational materials, including maps and surveys, in Spanish.
- Ensure the language used in outreach and education materials reflect the audience's education levels and levels of familiarity with Forest Service processes.
- Include maps of public lands as part of all outreach activities, so participants can learn where they have been using public lands, what agency manages the lands they use, and what the different management approaches mean for their current and future uses.
- When designing outreach and education activities, consider that 34 percent of the Latinos residing in Teton County are under the age of 19, and many of their parents work multiple jobs.
- Develop or enhance partnerships with organizations that serve Teton County's Latino communities, including the Doug Coombs Foundation, One22, the Teton County Library, and Grand Teton National Park's Pura Vida program.
- Research the Trust for Public Land's engagement process for the construction of a park at Astoria hot springs, which may provide some lessons for and insights into engaging Teton County's Latino community.
- One22's 2017 Teton County Community Youth Needs Analysis provides valuable context for those interested in working with Teton County's Latino community.

C. Engaging young people

Engaging young people was identified by several interviewees as a critical and challenging undertaking. One person said: "The biggest thing that I fear is not so much controversy or this side vs. that side, but a disengaged public…If the Forest Service doesn't find ways to continuously, creatively engage the public in meaningful ways, geezers like me are not going to be replaced by a young, passionate crowd." The following are some ideas interviewees shared for engaging young people:

- Partner with schools to connect with children and their parents. Several interviewees felt that working with schools and students might also be a viable way to reach the "general user." Interviewees cited the Blackrock Field Camp as a successful example of this approach.
- Partner with local organizations that serve young people. One interviewee mentioned the weekly summer hiking program for 6- to 12-year-olds that the Doug Coombs Foundation runs in partnership with the Forest Service Wilderness Ranger, Chelsea Phillipe. Suggested potential partner organizations include:

    - SheJumps, which “increases the participation of women and girls in outdoor activities to foster confidence, leadership, and connection to nature and community through free and low-cost outdoor education.” The Forest Service last partnered with them on an event in 2017.
    - One22, which works towards one thriving and diverse Greater Teton Community by investing in and supporting our neighbors who face health, financial, and cultural challenges. They produced a community youth needs analysis in January 2018 that could inform engagement strategies.
    - Public libraries
    - Teton Science Schools
- Survey young people about their interests and how they would prefer to be engaged. One interviewee recommended that the Forest Service start by surveying their trail crews and other seasonal employees.

VII. Assessment Team Recommendations

In light of the findings discussed above, the Assessment Team encourages the BTNF to consider the following recommendations. While many good ideas for improving Forest management and practices can be gleaned from this assessment, our recommendations specifically focus on advancing collaboration and stakeholder engagement. Recommendations are not listed in order of priority, per se—all of these ideas can assist the Forest in its work and should be considered, and many of them are mutually reinforcing. We look forward to discussing these recommendations in further depth with the Forest.

1. Build agency staff capacity for acting collaboratively and effectively engaging with stakeholders and the public

Agency staff at all levels have to constantly navigate conflicting stakeholder and public perspectives and interests, as well as maintain trust and working relationships with a diverse set of stakeholders and the public. Unfortunately, they increasingly must do so amid limited resources and staff capacity, as well as in the context of growing demands on forest use. This is a challenging task, and one that is made much easier through appropriate training and capacity building.

To assist the Forest and its employees in successfully navigating this challenging context, we recommend the Forest and/or Region 4 invest in training agency staff members in the basic skills of collaborative problem solving, stakeholder engagement, and conflict management. We also encourage the Forest to work with conflict resolution and collaboration professionals, as appropriate, to provide coaching and support for forest staff dealing with particularly challenging situations and issues. Building staff capacity and providing access to appropriate support will assist with implementation of many of the below recommendations.

2. Foster a collaborative presence throughout the Forest, especially outside the Jackson District

Interviewees commonly expressed a strong desire to connect with agency staff in person, and to do so in the places where interviewees live, work, and play. They often indicated they felt opportunities for such connection was limited, particularly in areas farther away from the Jackson office. To capitalize on this interest, build widespread support for effective Forest management, and help ensure compliance, we recommend the Forest Service invest time and energy in fostering a "collaborative presence" throughout the Forest, particularly in more outlying areas where people appear to feel less connected to Forest-related decision making.

To do this, we suggest that agency staff attend community events in outlying areas and meetings of key collaboratives, community groups, and partner organizations—at least periodically, if not frequently. We also recommend that agency staff at all levels be prepared and make an effort to meaningfully engage with users and the public while out in the field; it may help to have staff wear uniforms or other clothing that identify them as agency staff while working in the field and otherwise "on the job." It is important to ensure that agency staff members are prepared to be effective ambassadors for the Forest; i.e., they need to be reasonably knowledgeable about what is happening on the Forest and about Forest-related decision making, and (as per our first recommendation) also need to be able and willing to effectively listen to, understand, and respond to diverse perspectives and concerns related to the Forest. Just "showing up" is not enough; agency staff need to be prepared to share accurate information, answer questions, and respond effectively to stakeholder and public concerns about the Forest. Based on our

findings, we believe investing in this kind of "collaborative presence" throughout the Forest, especially in outlying areas, could go a long way toward building trust in the Forest Service and buy-in for efforts.

3. Invest in bringing the public and stakeholders "along for the ride" on decision making

Interviewees often expressed a desire to better understand Forest management efforts and decisions. Additionally, our sense from interviews is that often conflict and concern about Forest Service decisions and activities has more to do with a lack of understanding about why certain things are being done rather than being upset about the actual decisions or actions. In light of these findings, we suggest that the agency be intentional about bringing the public and key stakeholders "along for the ride" in the decision-making process—i.e., give stakeholders and the public meaningful opportunities to feel heard and to learn about the reasoning informing decisions, even if they do not agree with them. This can result in broader public support for and trust in the agency, which, in turn, can help projects progress more quickly.

To help with this, we suggest the Forest Service put in place a clear and straightforward process for not only soliciting, but also responding to public comments on key decisions and actions. Response to public comments should explain why and how the final decisions do or do not reflect the intent of the comments received. In our experience, many agencies do a reasonably good job of soliciting public comments but stop short of helping the concerned public know they were heard and that their comments were considered, which leads to frustration with the process and ultimate outcome.

We also suggest the Forest Service continue to hold public meetings around key topics and decisions, and that the Forest consider and learn from the advice for improving public meetings discussed above in Section VI(3). For example, careful thought should be put into holding meetings at times of day that would accommodate diverse community members (i.e., on weekends, during times that would enable participation by service industry workers, etc.) and in locations that are accessible to the target audience, including outlying areas where people appear to feel disconnected from Forest decision making. We also suggest that public meetings provide an opportunity not just for information sharing and comment solicitation, but also for meaningful dialogue among participants and agency staff. This can help build mutual understanding about Forest issues, as well as trust and relationships.

4. Engage stakeholders and the public the way they want to be engaged

A core best practice of public participation and engagement is to engage with people in the ways they need and want to be engaged. We recommend the Forest Service develop a thoughtful outreach and engagement strategy that is informed by consultation with core and target audiences (such as tribes, youth, and the Latino community) regarding how they would like to be kept informed and engaged. This assessment should provide a starting point, but more consultation with key audiences, particularly those who have historically not been effectively engaged or have felt left out, is necessary to ensure appropriate and effective outreach and engagement. If key agency staff make an effort to really listen to and try to understand the needs of these communities and how they want to be involved, this may go a long way in and of itself toward building trust and relationships, as well as buy-in for Forest decisions and actions.

5. Consider hosting community learning forums on key issues

Interviewees expressed differing opinions, and even some degree of confusion about, key aspects of the Forest's planning and management. Moreover, they also showed a keen interest in the work the Forest

Service is doing on the Forest and what is being learned in the process. To harness this interest and address potentially problematic confusion, we suggest the Forest Service consider hosting, or working with other organizations to host, interactive community learning forums on key issues and topics. These forums would aim to support peer-to-peer learning about issues and processes that affect Forest management and planning. They would likely involve bringing in topic experts to share unbiased information with participants, and then provide time for participants and agency staff to engage in meaningful dialogue about the topic and related opportunities and challenges. Some topics that might benefit from such forums include, in no particular order: the NEPA process and how it works; vegetation management opportunities and challenges; and recreation impacts on wildlife and how they can be mitigated. A list of topics that interviewees expressed interest in learning more about can be found in Section VI(7) under "Educational and interpretive programming is helpful and can be increased."

6. Consider regular updates via newspaper, radio and podcast interviews, Facebook, and public meetings

Interviewees generally understand the problems the Forest is dealing with due to lack of funding, and many acknowledge that the staff of the Forest are doing their best and often do great work. That said, they often expressed a desire to know more about upcoming decisions, actions, and what is happening on the Forest and. In order to create more of a "Forest Community" in the region, and to help bring people along for the ride as discussed above, we suggest the agency consider providing regular updates that discuss not only topics of immediate concern, such as wildlife or fire closures, but also issues of general concern, such as the status of ongoing projects. These updates could potentially be provided via briefs in local newspapers, radio and podcast interviews, Facebook posts, or public meetings. This would provide the Forest with an opportunity to educate its constituents on the status of projects and the science involved with any one issue, share success stories, and thank partners. Having more of an acknowledged Forest Community could help enable problem solving and communications in the future.

7. Invest in a collaborative recreation planning effort

This assessment made clear that increasing recreation pressure on the Forest is a widespread concern, and that stakeholders and the general public are worried about conflicting uses, impacts of recreation on flora and fauna, and the general sustainability of increasing recreational use. A key recommendation from this assessment is that the time is ripe for some form of collaborative recreation planning effort, and that failing to directly address this issue (or addressing it in a non-collaborative way) could be problematic. What exactly this effort would look like and how it would fit with other Forest planning and decision-making merits further conversation. Our findings suggest that there are many external partners who would be interested in helping to fund and otherwise support a collaborative recreation planning effort.

8. Leverage partners, including Friends of the Bridger-Teton, to secure resources and enhance management capacity

Many existing and potential partners can—and appear to be eager to—assist the Forest Service in successfully managing the Forest; there is widespread interest in effective recreation management, wildlife habitat management, and vegetation management, and many people and organizations want to help the agency have the resources and capacity to do these things well. Partners can also assist by providing resources and support for planning and engagement processes, including those recommended in this report. While we recognize the Forest Service feels limited in its ability to effectively leverage existing and potential partnerships, we recommend putting time and effort into finding ways to do so, in order to help address existing, and likely ongoing, staff and funding limitations. We and others believe Friends of the Bridger-Teton will greatly assist in this regard and we encourage the agency to lean on the

Friends to help foster other partnerships, including with foundations and other funders. We would be happy to discuss this, along with our other recommendations, further.

Appendix A: Stakeholder Groups Represented

During the spring of 2019, staff from the Environmental Dispute Resolution Program and Ruckelshaus Institute conducted in-depth confidential interviews with 37 individuals. Interviewees included individuals from the following stakeholder groups and organizations, and were intentionally selected to ensure representation and perspectives from all Forest Districts:

- US Forest Service
- National Park Service
- Wyoming Game & Fish Department
- Wyoming Conservation Districts
- State of Wyoming elected officials
- County elected officials
- Native American tribes
- University of Wyoming
- Hunting permittees
- Grazing permittees
- Oil and gas permittees
- Outfitters/dude ranch permittees
- Local business owners
- Conservation organizations
- Recreation organizations
- Organizations serving low-income and Spanish-speaking youth and adults in Teton County

Groups we reached out to, but were unable to speak with:

- Wyoming public school employees
- Timber permittees
- Mining permittees
- Rafting or fishing guides

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Introduction

Thank you for taking time to participate in our interview. I am (first and last name) with the (organization). We have been contracted by the US Forest Service to gather information about stakeholder perceptions regarding Bridger-Teton National Forest issues.

The Bridger-Teton National Forest is not undertaking forest plan revision at this time and will not for at least another year or two due to federal funding constraints. However, this information will be useful to the Forest Service if and when it embarks on plan revision. We are interested in hearing your perspective on Forest management and related issues, as well as how the Forest Service is doing with regards to stakeholder engagement and collaboration. Your perspective will help the Forest Service determine what issues to tackle and how to engage with various interest groups as they move to develop strategies for the Bridger-Teton National Forest.

We expect to interview between 30 and 40 people. All information is confidential, and reporting will be in aggregate, never attributed to any person. All information we receive from you will be anonymous.

Have you reviewed the Stakeholder Assessment Consent Form?
Do you have any questions for me?
Do I have your permission to begin asking you questions?

Questions

1. Tell me about your relationship with the Bridger-Teton National Forest, which I will refer to as the Forest from now on. What do you value about the Forest?

2. How do you use Forest lands?
    a. What parts of the Forest do you interact with most?

3. If not addressed:
    i. Do you recreate on the Forest? If so, how?
    ii. Do you depend on the Forest for income? If so, how?
    iii. Do you use or rely on the Forest in any other way?

4. What do you think is working well on the Forest in terms of management?

5. What do think is not working so well?

6. Is there anything you are particularly concerned about? Why?

7. What aspects of the Forest's management do you feel could be improved? Why and how so?
8. If not already addressed:
    a. Do you feel that specific geographic areas/zones of the Forest need notably different management approaches?
        i. Why? How?

ii. What constitutes different zones in your mind? [if relevant]

9. What challenges do you foresee in making changes to improve Forest management?

10. Do you have any ideas for how those challenges might be overcome?

11. We'd like your opinion regarding what levels of agreement exist regarding management on the Bridger-Teton:
    a. Are there key sources of agreement? What are they?
    b. Are there key sources of disagreement/conflict? What are they?
    c. Do you think any of the strategies you suggested for improving forest management would be widely supported? Why so or why not?

12. How do you feel the Forest Service is doing in terms of stakeholder engagement and collaboration?
    a. What's working well?
    b. What could be improved and how?

13. How would you like to be contacted about and engaged in decision making about the Forest and its management? *[for example: receive notifications through local papers, flyers, mailers, emails, or social media, such as posts on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc., have an opportunity to comment, story mapping efforts, be part of an ongoing key stakeholder collaborative that meets every month or so to coordinate with the US Forest Service, etc.]*

14. Who do you feel should be involved in/have a say in management and planning of the Forest? Why?

15. Are there any particular parties that haven't been as engaged as much or as well as they should be?
    a. How might we engage them?

16. Is there anything else you would like to share about the Forest, the state of its management, stakeholder engagement, or paths forward?

17. Who else would you recommend we talk to in order to understand different stakeholders' perspectives on the Forest and its management?

18. Do you have any other questions for us?